

Captured or Capturing? Narcotics and Political Instability along the “African Route” to Europe

Original article

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Francesco Strazzari*

Abstract: This article explores the dynamics across North and West Africa—i.e., along a major supply route to Europe—engaging with journalistic, policy, and academic writings. It seeks to shed light on the way in which drug trade relates to the weakness/fragility of state structures, by focusing on two cases that are as diverse as Guinea-Bissau and Morocco: the former is often stigmatized as an unstable, quintessential narco-state, while the latter is widely regarded as a solid ally of the West in projecting stability in the region. The article first considers quantitative governance indicators and indexes: then, with the help of secondary literature and expert interviews, it delves into drug-related local dynamics. It concludes that the long dominant understanding of the nexus organised crime-political instability is problematic. Transnational organised crime does not have a history and trajectory that can be separate from the body politic, and framing the problem in terms of an “external contaminant” that attacks legitimate institutions can be misleading. More research efforts should be directed towards the study of state-sponsored networks and wider regional economies.

Keywords: Organised Crime; Narcotics; Trafficking; Governance; Stability

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Introduction

The way in which transnational organised crime and drug trafficking represent a threat for weak and fragile states is discussed in different strands of scholarly and nonscholarly literature. In reviewing the literature on conflict drivers and risk factors associated with violence, for example, the World Bank's *Development Report 2011* considers international organised crime and trafficking as part of those external stresses that are often beyond a country control, specifying that "the unprecedented progression of organised crime could spell the collapse of many weak states" (World Bank: 2011, 76). For its part, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development addresses the question by laying emphasis on the erosion of state capacity and legitimacy by criminal networks (OECD, 2011). According to the UN General Assembly

"transnational organised crime is a menace to States and societies (...) eroding the "fundamental obligation of States to provide for law and order" (UNGA, 2004: 53). An emerging body of literature has been focussing on the nexus between drug smuggling and organised violence/conflict (Cornell, 2005) with a number of scholars devoting attention to the harm that criminal enterprises cause to the quality of governance (MacCoun and Reuter, 2001; Van Dijk, 2007). Some scholars have developed analytical frameworks that unpack the concept of harm along key aspects such as the monopoly of coercion, the administration of justice, the degree of administrative capacity, the provision of public goods, and conflict management (Bailey and Godson, 2000: 8-9). Others have added to functional integrity forms of immaterial harm caused to international reputation (Paoli et al., 2013: 3).

Conceived as an incursion in this debate, the present article argues that the all too common view about omnipotent non-state criminal actors taking over weak states has severe analytical limitations. If one observes the nexus that exists between narcotics, governance and conflict along Europe's supply routes, the concept of "state protection", as opposed to "state capture", offers a more fertile ground to improve our understanding of broader regional geopolitical dynamics. The article proceeds as follows: after offering a quick overview of the current debate on the nexus "organised crime-state fragility/failure", it scrutinizes the harm caused by criminal networks. To examine how the political-criminal nexus affects governance, functional integrity is considered here in terms of operational integrity of the state, and it is assessed through capacity-related indicators. These indicators are read against the backdrop of drug trafficking-related dynamics and events, whose salience and relevance are interpreted with the help of secondary literature and semi-structured interviews that were conducted with scholars and international officers/practitioners who specialize on the region^[1].

Empirical analysis is carried out on two cases that are observed over a decade (2002-2011): Morocco and Guinea Bissau are each in its own distinctive way exposed to illicit drugs production and smuggling dynamics related to supply to the European market. As further specified below, the two cases are selected not for direct comparison, but with a view to generating insights about how narcotics trade via vulnerability and selective advantages can be related to governance and political (in)stability.

Failing states and the threat of organised crime

As Western governments have become less concerned with traditional attacks on their national frontiers on the part of strong, aggressive states, their security agenda (and the agenda of security studies) has increasingly been focusing on those non-military challenges that stem from geographically proximate “weak”, “failing” or “failed” states,

i.e. the states that are unable to control their borders and, according to a widespread view, may become incubators of organised crime and terrorism (Hansen, 2011). According to the U.S. Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, “weak or failed governance” have become a significant security challenge for the United States (U.S. Dept. of State, 2010: 121). Likewise, NATO’s *Strategic Concept* adopted in 2010 lists failed states among the “new threats” that should orient strategic planning. For its part, the European Security Strategy *A Secure Europe in a Better World* (European Council, 2003) identifies five main menaces: terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts with an international impact, organised crime and failed states.

Spurred on by the World Bank, the scholarly and policy debate on conflict-affected state fragility took off over the past few years. The opening of a Global Center on Conflict, Security and Development in Nairobi in February 2012 can be seen as an important moment along this trajectory, where scholarly and policy research mix. During the same years the EU has spared no political, military and economic efforts to assist the stability of its neighbourhood: a glance at the rapidly evolving EU foreign and defence policy shows that Brussels was typically engaged in peacebuilding operations aimed at assisting fragile states in manifold sectors such as governance or the rule of law, hosting security sector reform and border control components. Further, European countries were engaged in a number of complex military operations abroad, while a distinctive military dimension of EU was looming. Libya, for example, was portrayed as a proto-typical example of threat to regional stability posed by state collapse (Larison, 2013). A couple of years later, the French intervention in Mali too was justified on sensitivity of the topic, and following interviewees’ request, the Project encoded names: accordingly, this article discloses only the date in which the interview was made. The author wishes to thank Fabrizio Coticchia, Eva Magdalena Stambol, Giovanni Zanoletti and Hans van der Veen, as well as the anonymous reviewers of EROC, for their valuable comments and critiques. The contents of this article are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

grounds of preventing the ominous consequences of yet another case of fragility turning into state collapse, the ideal situation for terrorism and transnational crime to thrive.

For a decade at least, scholars and policy makers have been laying emphasis on state weakness

as an important factor underlying the onset of violent conflict (Holsti, 2000; Vayrynen, 2000; Kaldor, 2006). The post-Cold War literature has devoted significant attention to the growing capabilities of non-state actors such as criminal networks, warlords or insurgents, examining how, via patronage or the use of force, they may seize opportunities and increase their power in the face of state weakness (Williams, 1994; Marten, 2012). A distinctive strand of literature has focused on how weak states may harbour transnational criminal networks, and become springboards for security threats that may destabilise entire regions (Cornell and Svenstrom, 2006).

Usually imbued with medical and physical metaphors, the dominant view among policy makers has become one whereby criminal networks are first and foremost a powerful weakening factor for states. In the mentioned World Bank *2011 World Development Report* one reads that “the more fragile states and regions are not able to counter these challenges without significant amounts of international help: the resources and manpower available to them can be simply overwhelmed by these non state actors” (World Bank, 2011: 218). Likewise, according to the UNODC “criminal organisations have the power to destabilise society and governments”^[2]. Although researchers tend to agree on the fact that narcotics are more linked to the duration of already existing conflicts than to the initiation of new ones (Ross, 2004; Fearon, 2004), the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has certainly not gone unheard when he underlined how criminals and drug dealers are constantly taking advantage of open borders, free markets, technological innovations and, above all, weak institutions^[3].

During the past two decades a body of alarmist grey literature has developed new, often conceptually loose categories to analyse the relationship between declining states on the one hand and powerful, almost omnipotent non-state criminal actors on the other. According to Naim (2012), for example, “a new threat has emerged: the mafia state. Across the globe, criminals have penetrated governments to an unprecedented degree [...] They are no longer merely a law enforcement challenge but a full-blown national security threat”. In this view, mafia-states emerge thanks to the weak economy, where cash-rich criminal organisations can acquire immense power. Grown out of state weakness and failure, state capture by transnational organised criminals that are “powered by globalisation” finds its apotheosis in those “narco-states” (Miller, 2007), “drug trafficker’s dreams” (Smoltczyk, 2013). Pushed to an extreme, this line may lead to arguing that we one day we will be confronted with no less than “nuclear mafia states”^[4].

Borrowed from studies on transition economies (Hellman et al. 2000), the image of the “state capture” (e.g., drug barons that take over poor states in decay) has been adopted in scholarly and policymaking circles to interpret political instability, violence and *coup d’états*, especially in areas such as Western Africa and the Sahel. For instance, *The New York Times* has long described smuggling activities in this region by hand of powerful, pernicious traffickers who penetrate into “smaller and weakly governed states, further corrupting and destabilising them” (Savage and Shanker, 2012). In commenting instability in Mali in 2013, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted the need for recognising that terrorist syndicates are also criminal enterprises (Bergenas and Mufti, 2013). Clinton’s argument reverberates the existing scholarly and policy literature on the

so-called crime-terror nexus (Makarenko, 2004; Oheme III, 2008): it is a fact that over the past few years a significant part of US counter-terrorism engagement (especially programs geared to enhancing the capabilities of the local security forces) has shifted to new fronts along the borders of weak states in North and West Africa (Cave et al., 2012). Along similar lines Inkster and Comolli underline that “(a)s trafficking routes have diversified, some West African states have shown themselves particularly vulnerable to state capture, with all the threats that this poses to the development of robust and effective institutions” (2012a: 35).

Undoubtedly, the series of *coups*, crises and tensions that have swept the region throughout the past decade provide evidence of the deterioration of democratic governance. How to read this fact is where ideas may differ. U.S. officials have insisted on the fact that “Colombian and Venezuelan traffickers in recent years have shipped billions of dollars of cocaine to Europe and the U.S. with the help of corrupt officials in African nations such as Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Togo and Nigeria” (UNODC, 2012). Most political changes along the “new cocaine route”, as it came to be labelled, have been conceived as a direct emanation of state weakness; the latter, in its turn, is often conceptualised and measured in terms of law enforcement capabilities, as well as economic, political and social conditions (Inkster and Comolli, 2012b). So, paraphrasing the UNODC (2011), the weakness of nation-states is responsible for West Africa’s vulnerability to smuggling and instability^[5]. This dominant narrative underlies the choice made by alarmed Western countries and African regional organisations to extend aid and support towards those countries that are considered to be “at risk of criminal capture”.

According to Call (2010), both neo-liberal and neo-conservative foreign policy approaches have tried to codify the symptoms of state fragility and failure in terms of capacity deficiencies, bearing in mind the Western image of what a modern state should look like. If anything, Mali’s capitulation to Islamist fighters in 2012, and the subsequent creation of an Al Qaeda-run vast portion of its territory, has been exacerbating this reading. In a nutshell: if smuggling activities have opened the door to terrorists, then international actors should engage in state-strengthening actions in the region, beginning with the fight against organised crime and drug smuggling. African leaders, for their part, have learned this, and have incorporated this expectation in their aid- (and rent-) seeking calculus.

Conceptual problems

The assessment of the degree of failure, fragility or weakness is extremely complicated and controversial. According to the OECD (2011), while definitions may vary there exists a shared consensus on the main attributes of fragility: the erosion of legitimacy of national and local authorities and the inability to deliver public goods such as security. Analysts sought to develop various categories and sub-categories of weak/failed state^[6], sometimes distinguishing between failed and fragile states (Patrick, 2007). The *Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Project* (CIFP),

for example, considers weak states as *close to* or *at* a vulnerable stage because of limited governance capacity, economic stagnation, inability to ensure the security of their borders and sovereign domestic territory. Thus, while fragile states are thought to be those at risk of failure or collapse (Fearon, 2010), failed state, in their turn are usually understood as those characterised by violent conflict, humanitarian crises, and economic collapse: contexts where “government authority, legitimacy and capacity no longer extend throughout the state, but instead are limited either to specific regions or groups”^[7].

Different attempts have been made to measure the degree of weakness and failure^[8]. The Fund For Peace has developed the *Failed States Index* along twelve social, economic, political and military indicators of state vulnerability (e.g., demographic pressures, deterioration of public services, intervention of other external political actors or the movement of refugees)^[9]. Loss of physical control of the territory, erosion of legitimate authority and inability to provide public services are usually conceived as crucial attributes of state failing.

The conceptualisation, codification and aggregation operations that underlie attempts to build poor state performance indexes have by now come under strong criticism from many quarters, at least in the academic world (Hill, 2005; Guitierrez Sanin, 2011). Nonetheless, even *Foreign Affairs* has certified the rise and fall of the state failure paradigm (Mazarr, 2014): thinking in terms of “institutions under pressure”, “ungoverned spaces” and “fragility traps”—to mention only some of the most common tropes in today’s literature—may easily revive and reiterate a similar conceptual grammars. By moving the concept and the practice of security into the terrain of preemption, the incorporation of notions such as risk and resilience may easily sharpen and magnify the very same lines of thinking. While reluctance to consider fragility as a category of states is today relatively common, the urge to produce quantification and indexes has not led the debate to fundamentally overcome situations in which different research institutions would propose rankings and indexes that do not compare and may hardly add up.

Widespread views (and public rhetoric) anchored to state weakness and/or fragility may not be the best starting point to venture into empirically assessing the connection between drug supply and governance/stability. Research on how different illicit drug markets are prone to violence, to limit the discussion to a potential driver of political instability, show that while international drug trade is widely considered be a core violent sector of entire illicit regional economies, considerable variation is observable across time and space, as well as across the type of narcotics industry (Andreas and Wallman, 2009). Cocaine and heroin appear to be linked to organised violence in different ways and with different foci than marijuana or ecstasy, and this happens in different ways in presence of different interdiction and counter-trafficking strategies in different places located along the production/supply line. Research should be aware of the bias introduced by sensationalism: research should encompass nonevents and low-profile cases in which violence is far from evident (Andreas and Wallmann, 2009: 228). As Lupsha (1996), among others, has demonstrated, the relationship between criminal groups and the state is subject to major variation and evolution, ranging from predatory, to parasitic and symbiotic. To problematise the nexus that exists between

drug smuggling, governance and instability, closer, more nuanced comparative scrutiny is in order: qualitative methods seem to be best poised to help venturing into the uncertain and the unofficial, looking into dynamics of protection and extraction through lenses that are usually adopted by comparative historical sociology (Tilly, 1985; Thompson, 1994; Van der Veen, 1999; Volkov, 2000).

Considering this, it is worth looking into the presumed usefulness of the state weakness/capture hypothesis, by assessing it on its own terms. Following Newman (2009: 422), we can speak of state weakness when “central government has a poor capacity to control public order within its territory, is unable to consistently control its borders, cannot reliably maintain viable public institutions or services, and is vulnerable to extra-constitutional domestic challenges”. State failure, then, would be that stage in which central state authority and control no longer exist. The next two sections will assess the validity and the usefulness of such conceptual and analytical categories by empirically exploring the criminal and extra-legal channels for narcotic smuggling in two case studies that are located along Europe’s supply line: Guinea-Bissau and Morocco.

Guinea-Bissau: A successful failed state

Already in the 1960s, the West African region started to affirm itself as a hub for cannabis production and smuggling, but a much larger drug trade emerged only in the 1980s. The turning point occurred at the beginning of the 21st century, when enhanced interdiction efforts on traditional routes led Latin American cocaine traffickers to look for alternatives. Growing demand for cocaine in Europe, the contraction of the U.S. market and tighter controls on other routes are the permissive conditions that fostered the drug business in West Africa (Brombacher and Maihold, 2009).

Various estimates indicated that between a quarter to two-thirds of the cocaine that is on its way from South America to Europe would take the so-called *A10*, or the African route running along the 10th parallel^[10]. The UNODC World Drug Report 2006 documents the seizure of more than 40 tons of cocaine between 2004 and 2005 in the region: likewise, eight cases of containerised shipment from West Africa to Europe are documented between 2005 and 2012 (UNODC, 2013). For its part, EUROPOL data, too, illustrate how the African route drew international concern, especially after 2004. In most recent years, the route seems to have lost some of its salience (UNODC, 2012). This change can be explained by the fact that this route too has attracted attention, thereby pushing traffickers to skip coastal landing tracks and try to reach directly smuggling hubs further afield in the Sahel. Thus, while seizures illustrate a decline in the flow of cocaine through West Africa (from 47 tons in 2007 to 18 tons in 2008)^[11] one cannot infer from this data a decline of trafficking activities. As the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and EUROPOL jointly highlight, these numbers may “reflect a change in trafficking methods and/or routes than an effective shrinking of cocaine flows towards the region” (EMCDDA-EUROPOL, 2013). Be that as it may, the UNODC and other sources see indications that traffickers have gradually abandoned the *A10* maritime route (UNODC, 2013).

Large-scale poverty, widespread corruption, and problems plaguing the functioning of the judicial and institutional system are all factors that have facilitated the emergence of an African route (Inkster and Comolli, 2012b). Cocaine prices are lowest by the trafficking hubs of Guinea-Bissau, and they rise the closer the cocaine gets to Europe^{[12][13]}. The 2008 UNODC Report on West Africa defines the country as a strategic sub-regional route for drug transport, repackaging and distribution, highlighting the growing influence gained by Colombian and Venezuelan gangs in the country: the image of criminal groups that exploit state weakness, causing turmoil and capturing government, once set in, has everything but changed (UNODC, 2011)¹³. While overall seizures have diminished, in 2013 the UNODC threat assessment for West Africa still considered Guinea-Bissau as the core of the so-called Northern hub along the West African route.

Investigative and intelligence reports claim that small twin-engine planes are making the 1,600-mile Atlantic crossing from Latin America to the edge of Africa's western bulge, landing in Guinea-Bissau's uninhabited islands and remote estuaries. Some sources would estimate that at the peak of trafficking activities between 800 and 1,000 kg of cocaine would land this way each night. Thus, there seems to be little doubt that Guinea-Bissau has become an important transit point for Latin American cocaine heading to Europe^[14]. In the period 2006-2007 some 650 kg per year were seized^[15]. According to Brombacher and Maihold (2009: 13) "one hundred kilos of pure cocaine, dumped on a beach in Guinea-Bissau, would have a market value in Europe that is equivalent to all the development aid that the country receives in a year." Other sources claim that in Guinea-Bissau the profits from narcotics "exceed the gross national income" (Asare Kyey, 2013). The Africa Economic Development Institute affirms that the cocaine trade would be worth 2 billion dollars a year (almost twice the national GDP)^[16].

Smuggling and counter-trafficking dynamics expose the complicity of the state apparatus: for example, in 2007 the head of police who was responsible for the seizures of 2006 was fired¹⁷. At the end of the same year, four Colombian traffickers were released (IRIN, 2008). Airplanes that landed in the country were never checked by police officers due to opposition from the military. The largest single seizure of cocaine made in 2008 (600 kg) was "encouraged" by the presence on the ground of international reporters, who persuaded the chief of police to act (Smoltczyk, 2013)^[17].

Organised crime and political convulsions

Since its independence from Portugal (1974) Guinea-Bissau has known civil wars, coups, attempted coups and political instability (Vigh, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Cravo, 2012). While no elected president has ever completed his term in office, since the decapitation of top-level state authorities that took place in 2009^[18] acute political crises and unrest have drawn international attention. For example, the mutiny of April 2010, during which renegade soldiers arrested the Prime Minister, led to the closing down of the mission that the EU had dispatched to the country, which was primarily aimed at reforming the national security sector (Lopez, 2010). A new military *coup* took place in

April 2012, just ahead of a new presidential run-off election. Civilian power was restored a month later,^[19] but apprehension remained following reports of killings and serious human rights violations^[20]. In December 2012 the UN Security Council expressed serious concern over the lack of progress in the restoration of constitutional order (UNSC, 2013)^[21].

As the UNODC reports, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation blamed the 2012 coup on the Chief of Staff of the armed forces, who “aimed to undermine processes of reform, assuring his continuing collaboration with organised crime in Guinea-Bissau” (UNODC, 2013).

Several journalistic reports have depicted Guinea-Bissau as a drugs haven, especially after the April 2012 coup (Nossiter, 2012). Scholars and country experts tend to agree that the political instability that became manifest with the murder of the president João Vieira in March 2009 is directly connected to drug trafficking. For instance, the UNODC (2009) reported the involvement of Mexican and Colombian cartels in the assassination of the then chief of the Army, Tagme na Wai. The interest of crime organisations in the country is often described as “shaping the country’s politics, security sector and people’s lives” (Rio Tinto, 2012).

Official documents, while emphasising the role of West Africa as a transit and storage region for transnational drug trafficking, tend to portray Guinea-Bissau as a paradigmatic case of narco-state. The political and economic vulnerability of the country has been generally conceived as the main reasons that led drug barons to choose it as a strategic hub for trafficking (EMCDDA, 2008). Nonetheless, finding details on drug routes is difficult, especially given the fact that domestic law enforcement agencies do not provide information. It is a fact that Guinea-Bissau lacked law enforcement capabilities to counter trafficking (UNODC, 2011): nevertheless, there are additional explanations for the development of the route across the African coast. Firstly, geography plays a fundamental role. Guinea-Bissau lies in-between Europe and Latin America and thus is “strategically well-located for drug-smuggling purposes” (Smoltczyk, 2013). Guinea-Bissau comprises more than 80 coastal islands, many of which are inhabited, thus offering a haven for discretely running trafficking activities. Secondly, language, cultural and economic ties with the Lusophone world (Brazil, Cape Verde and Portugal) play a role in facilitating logistics. Thirdly, Guinea-Bissau’s long history of domestic conflict goes hand in hand with the beating of illicit procurement and smuggling paths across North Africa and the Sahel, mainly for arms trafficking purposes. “Guinea-Bissau has been created by arms smuggling”—one interviewee affirmed. Old trade routes date back to the ancient Mali empire. Arms smuggling routes have oiled the state-making process at the time of the fight against the Portuguese colonial domination. More recently, one can observe that the consolidation of criminal networks originating in Nigeria and extending across Guinea Conakry and Senegal, are often structured around “personal logistics”^[22].

Fourthly, Guinea-Bissau has been a quintessential “forgotten country” for years, outside the radar of the international community. Thus, paradoxically, geopolitical marginality and remoteness, along with the existence of infrastructural facilities, have contributed to creating favourable conditions for

drug cartels to take root. Finally, a possible explanation of the growing relevance of Guinea-Bissau in the global drug trade is its traditional socio-economic structure based on one-crop production (cashew nuts)^[23]. While the agro-export sector was faltering, drug trafficking may have been facilitated by an economic structure where few actors have power over vast portions of territory.

The European Union has perceived the political convulsions in Bissau as the formation of a narco-state (Miller, 2007), eventually seeing in them a security threat. The “EU Drugs Action Plan 2009-2012,” the “Praia Action Plan” (2008), the “Treaty on the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre–Narcotics” (2007) are initiatives that illustrate the growing EU concern vis-à-vis instability in a region that came to be seen as “the perfect ground for organised criminal groups to spread and increase their trafficking in the EU”^[24]. The EU-Africa Lisbon Summit of 2007 adopted a specific “Joint EU-Africa Strategy”. A year later, in June 2008, the EU and the Guinea-Bissau authorities launched the “Security Sector Reform (SSR) Mission” (Council of the European Union, 2008). Endowed with no executive powers, and lacking resources, the mission was terminated two years after, following the aforementioned coup. At the same time, new initiatives were undertaken on the part of the EU to monitor narcotics in West Africa, along the very same analytical matrix for data processing that Brussels uses for the neighbouring Western Balkans^[25].

UNODC reports on West Africa have been stressing how the profits made through drug smuggling destabilise governments via widespread corruption. Looking for existing data concerning the harm caused by criminal networks to the operational integrity of the state, one may therefore check indicators referring to the monopoly in the use of force, corruption, rule of law, political violence or human rights violations, with a view to identifying possible connections with the unfolding of events related to drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. In other words, one can try to see if and how the evidence pointing to Guinea-Bissau as a transit hub for cocaine trade is linked to worsening indicators concerning governance: aggregated data on functional integrity can give some indication in this respect. Firstly, as illustrated by Fig. 1, the indicators adopted by the *Failed State Index* illustrate a steady deterioration in key aspects to assess state strength: security apparatus, legitimacy and public services.

Fig. 1 - Failed States index: Guinea Bissau 2006-2010 (1-stable/10 at risk)

Over the same period the *Worldwide Governance Indicators* highlight the steady decline of rule of law in the country^[26], thus showing, among other things, the ineffectiveness of the EU SSR mission aim. One observes a downward trend after 2004, even if—to be true—figures are extremely low throughout the period considered. The overall performance of Guinea-Bissau concerning governance effectiveness and political stability is negative²⁸. However, these trends remain more or less stable across time, with the exception of a general positive increase at the beginning of the new century (end of civil war), and a limited decrease after 2007-2008 (right before the assassination of President Viera).

The aggregated data collected on governance, taken all together, are indicative of some limited worsening. In other terms, while drug trafficking quickly rapidly escalated, the institutional and social context deteriorated very gradually: the state became less capable to provide public services, but no evidence that one can describe as collapse can be found. For instance, civil society does not appear as weak as one could expect²⁹. Recorded human rights violations have been significant after the 2012 coup, but all datasets confirm a noteworthy enhancement over the entire observation period^[27]. To be true, several episodes of political violence are reported^[28]. However, violence was limited to the state elite level, affecting political leaders, NGOs members, police officers and soldiers. No street gang fighting, no civil war broke out: the overall magnitude of violence remained relatively low. As Smolczyk (2013) notes, “[f]or a narco state, Guinea-Bissau seems rather peaceful, even sleepy at times. There are no junkies here and no beheaded traitors on the roadside. The daily drug trade is conducted virtually without violence”. The assassinations of President Viera, the bomb attack that killed the then-chief of staff of the country’s armed forces and the murder of the presidential candidate Baciro Dabó represented the main episodes of political violence to date.

At the same time, the armed forces are accused from many quarters of direct involvement in the struggle for sharing profits of drug trade^[29]. Measurements of country corruption levels (such as the *Corruption Perceptions Index*) demonstrate a rise, especially during the period 2007-2009^[30]. Nevertheless, one has to read this data against the background of significant levels of corruption that have always characterised political life in Guinea-Bissau: the fight for the revenues deriving for smuggling and trafficking is a constant in national history³⁴. What is new is that new strategic positioning *via-à-vis* international drug trade has created bigger stakes in the process³⁵. The above-mentioned episodes of political violence can well be related to problems in the slicing of the cake: open violence has not been frequent because the “cake” has been often managed and divided among ruling elites through consensus mechanisms³⁶. If violence is an indicator of the level and type of competition, then one should highlight that violent struggles among drug cartels and criminal gangs is not on the record. This casts a deep shadow on the mainstream view whereby drug cartels from Latin America have invaded the country, violently captured the state and destroyed Guinea-Bissau as we knew it.

If one adopts conventional definitions, Guinea-Bissau no doubts belongs to the category of weak states, mainly due to the lack of control its whole territory (especially the costal islands) and to the incapacity to provide public services. Nevertheless, in and around Bissau the state *has been continually failing* since the time of state independence. According to an interviewed UN officer, it would be hard even to adopt the concept of state in the case of Guinea-Bissau³⁷. Based on these data, the image of a failed state in the hands of Latin American traffickers is misleading. While

carving out safe heavens in remote areas, criminal networks do not operate in an empty house^[31]. In other words, one should not confuse institutional weakness, which is the absence of centralised, autonomous institutions, for a vacuum of power in the country. Guinea-Bissau is ruled by power: the political and military leaders who have created solid networks with criminal enterprises^[32]. The military apparatus is the country's most powerful institution, and it holds the rein of political power. No doubt institutional weakness represents offers favourable condition for cartels to develop drug trafficking activities, but the key aspect in the calculus is the possibility to obtain *cheap* and *effective* protection as well as support from ruling elites says more about the centrality of the country as transit hub for cocaine^[33].

To sum up, drug barons came to Guinea-Bissau not because they were eager to hijack a failed state, but in view of the sponsorship that they would have received by state institutions, which proved to be successful in controlling and managing directly the drug trade^[34]. The military established criminal infrastructures, developing logistics support and personal networks, but they did not play just the role providers for foreign cartels⁴². As Rio Tinto (2012) puts it: "there's a clear pattern of interest articulation, with the national military being used to ensure the interest of the drug industry, through a tangled (but not that complex) web of contacts and associations". Very few political and military networks have been engaged in fights over the revenues related to drug trafficking^[35].

Bissau's military forces have historically sought to take control over the country's political institutions. The legacies derived from the war of liberation are still relevant and, in fact, they have been always represented in parliament, since the day independence was achieved. According to International Crisis Group, Guinean-Bissau army officers do not tend to take power for themselves: "usually what they do is remove a civilian and organise a transition. And then there's another civilian coming up. It is an army that has for some reason a sense that it shouldn't be itself in power, but that nevertheless the civilian part of the state must respect its rights and its privileges" (Hatcher, 2013).

Alien invasion and gangs in uniform

The UNODC (2012) reports do not miss the prominent role played by top-ranking military officials in the drug trade: "(g)overnments are crucial actors concerning drug trafficking in West Africa. Not in law enforcement actions, but in the management of cocaine smuggling"⁴⁴. According to a UN officer interviewed, the ships provided by the

UN to the armed forces to fight criminal networks at sea were used by the soldiers for drug trafficking purposes^[36]. Members of the Presidential guard confessed their role in providing illegal diplomatic passports while the Ministry of Interior released visa stamps in passports that were seized from Colombian traffickers in Senegal (Miller, 2007).

After the arrest of the Prime Minister by the military in April 2010, the U.S.

made more specific steps towards naming Guinean military officials as international drugs traffickers: the admiral who was appointed commander of the Navy (Bubo Na Tchuto), and the Air Force Chief of Staff (Ibraima Papa Camara) were identified by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as kingpins of the cocaine trade in West Africa (UNODC, 2010). The two were “arrested” in 2013 by U.S. special operatives, and put under trial in the U.S. for their alleged role in international cocaine trafficking.

This circumstance best helps to explain why considering drug traffickers in Guinea-Bissau as external actors was misleading. “Gangs in uniform”—as one interviewee defined them^[37]—became the rival groups in the competition for cocaine profits (UNODC, 2013). Affiliation could come to coincide with different armed forces (the Navy, Army and Air Force), as illustrated by dynamics the mutiny in 2010. Such groups are typically composed of few high-ranking officers: these networks—or perhaps circles—are extremely narrow, and devoid of a fully articulated pyramid structure^[38]. As Rio Tinto (2012) underlines, “what drives the conflict there are mostly the interests of single individuals or rather small groups of people with power, that mobilise violence resources for their own benefit”.

Only for the period 2007-2008 does one find clear evidence concerning the routes developed by drug traffickers: narcotics would come through the airports that were built during the civil war, also in the southern part of the country (e.g., Catio)⁴⁸. NGO workers that were active at grass-root level confirm that by the end of the 1990s there was neither perception nor information concerning the mounting role of transnational organised crime in the country⁴⁹.

At the same time, a strong presence of foreign traffickers in Guinea-Bissau is hard to confirm⁵⁰. Colombian, Venezuelan and Brazilian cartels are often reported to have set foot and to have developed connections in Western Africa. However, experts and officers identify a limited number (i.e., one or two) of organised foreign groups in the country. U.S. attempts to identify “the direct link between dangerous terrorist organisations, including Al Qaeda, and international drug trafficking that fuels their violent activities” (U.S. DEA, 2009) did not go far in tribunal courts. Criminal networks came to Western Africa, developing new routes to reach Europe in a moment in which the economic and financial crises in the region was particularly acute. But, for all the attention paid to Latin American drug barons in Western Africa by the media, they failed; no evidence exists to date of an external invasion strategically geared to capturing the state. According to an UNODC research expert “there are two major pre-existing factions competing for the market”^[39]. Narrow criminal enterprises play the main role, in strict cooperation and coordination with few groups composed by rival armed forces^[40].

Morocco’s stability and the “wars on cannabis”

Western Europe is the largest world market for cannabis resin, and the UNODC estimates that much of it comes from Morocco, the world's larger producer and exporter. Indications regarding the beginning of the observation period show that more than 80% of cannabis sold in Europe came from Morocco, and that this percentage decreased to approximately 70% by the year 2006 (ECMDDA, 2007). Data provided by the World Custom Organization suggest that cannabis from Morocco, in weight terms, accounted for 74% of seizures in 2006, down from the 82% of 2004 (EMCDDA, 2008: 191). The retail market value of cannabis exported from Morocco was estimated as 12 billion Euros by the UNODC in 2003, a couple of years later the harvest went down by two thirds, while the market value dropped to 4.6 billion (Gamella and Giménez Rodrigo, 2008: 264). Such a decline, if confirmed, could be interpreted in a number of ways, starting with eradication efforts made by the Moroccan government under international pressure, and ending with circumstantial factors, such as a major drought that hit the country in 2005. However, another explanation could be that drug supply channels have been diversified and moved elsewhere, along Saharan routes that escape interdiction initiatives and upon which we still do not have data. Increasing seizures of resin in neighbouring North African and Sahel countries—seems to at least partially corroborate this hypothesis. Algerian authorities declared having seized 200 tons of cannabis from Morocco in 2013.

Moroccan cannabis is historically cultivated along the narrow and remote valleys of the mountainous Rif region, an area that has never been fully integrated in the main formation process of the modern state. The history of the Rif is also a history of uprisings against the *Makhzen*, a word that historically indicates the place where the men of the Sultan would be paid, but which over time came to indicate taxation, and eventually became synonymous with elite, government apparatus, and police. The cultivation of the plant of *kif*, as it is called in Morocco, was legal during the second half of the 19th century, and no authority has ever succeeded in eradicating it. In the mostly Berber-inhabited districts of Ketama, Beni Seddate and Beni Khaled cultivation has long been *de facto* tolerated: it remains a taboo for public discussion, while in private the traveller is often remembered that "*le kif ne tue pas: la faim, si*"^[41]. In this region, one finds little sign of the kind of economic development that was experienced in Moroccan coastal cities: the peasantry is poor, infrastructures are scarce, and interdiction and substitution policies that were launched by King Hassan II in 1992 soon ran out of resources, foundered in corruption and distorted by local mafia-like clientele. Reportedly, local notables are involved in drug production and smuggling, and they enjoy higher protections, in the face of waves of repressive policies promoted by Rabat, which—on the other hand—proves to be quite keen on collaborating with international anti-drug agencies. Drug barons have made headway over time, reaching seats in parliament: in 1983 the land used for cannabis cultivation amounted to 12,000 hectares, while today, in spite of ongoing talks about a decline, is it estimated to have reached 180,000 hectares^[42]. It is hardly a disputable fact that Morocco's drug industry thrives on a global scale thanks to prohibition in Europe, which keeps prices high, entrenching production and trafficking.

The drug industry and its protectors

The analysis of aggregated data concerning the evolution of governance after 1999 can start by seeking to identify the impact on political stability of the so-called “war on cannabis”, a campaign that was launched in 2004 by the Moroccan authorities (Hamilton, 2007). Law enforcement actions have had political, economic and social implications that are reverberated in the worsening of physical integrity rights^[43] and, more in general, in some deterioration of political stability: Fig. 2 shows governance indicators commonly used by the World Bank heading downwards after 2004. As the “war on cannabis” peaks, one notes an apparent decrease in cannabis seizures, as well as the evening out of drug trafficking-related crimes. Whilst levels of corruption tend to remain constant and high, there is no way in which governance indicators could allow one to define Morocco as a weak or fragile state. However, as Fig. 2 illustrates, in correspondence with the “war on cannabis” those indicators that signal problems with the security apparatus^[44] register a significant increase.

Fig. 2. – Morocco: Worldwide Governance Indicators

Fig. 3 – Morocco: Failed States Index (1-stable/10 at risk)

In the production areas (in the Rif region) there are no indications of organised violence linked to the drug industry. The Moroccan context does not allow speaking of “lawless areas” because even the areas interested by a high volume of cannabis production/trafficking cannot be considered as falling completely outside the control of the government^[45]. It is true that in some areas - i.e., in Ketama - the state is less present: for example, the level of services the state provides is extremely limited^[46]. However, it is not possible to conclude that the state is unable to exercise effective territorial control^[47]. As far as “monopoly of force” is concerned, the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* attributes to Morocco a score of 8, on a scale that ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

To sum up, when looking at aggregated data, the *Worldwide Governance Indicators* for Morocco are relatively steady throughout the observation period, with the exception of a relative decline that is registered in the periods 2004-2005 and (to a lesser extent) 2007-2008. The limited impact that drug-related and organised crime-related events seem to have on governance in this context may be due to the fact that, despite the undisputable salience of the cannabis industry, the Moroccan state holds the reins on its territory, with a monopoly on the use of force throughout Moroccan territory^[48]. An important element that is worth noting is that no solid evidence linking drug trafficking and terrorism within Moroccan territory is available. This may be explained by the fact that the destabilising effects of terrorism seems to be seen by actors involved in cannabis trafficking as a menace to their activities^[49]. In this sense, the role of AQIM in Morocco seems to have been almost irrelevant during the observation period^[50].

Actors and dynamics: a stability question

Based on official estimates provided by the UNODC, it is clear that much of the money value produced along the drug supply line is not to the benefit of production activities. Assuming for the year 2005 a price of sale at the stage of production of 50 Moroccan Dirham per harvested kilogram, and of 4000 Dirham per kg of resin, one can estimate an amount of money close to 386 million euros, that is just a small portion of the abovementioned 4.6 million euros of market value that the UNODC estimated for the same year. This is no detail: it shows that the intractability of the problem does not lie in the “bnormal” (and often criminalised) Rif region. The latter remains far from standards of welfare compared to other regions of Morocco, while the cultivation of *kif* remains a matter of subsistence agriculture. In other words, money does not move upstream to production areas. Not surprisingly, money is entirely generated downstream, along a complex chain of collusive deals that characterise drug trafficking.

The Moroccan cannabis production and trafficking business can be best conceived of as a supply chain that is highly fragmented among a multiplicity of actors, but at the same time is characterised by the presence of drug barons in prominent roles, in particular when it comes to trafficking activities towards Europe. The supply chain structure is composed of a great number of cannabis producers often operating on a small scale, a certain number of actors that are in charge of buying the drug from the producers to aggregate and stock it locally and, finally, by a limited number of

barons that organise the shipment to Europe. Profits are usually reinvested into legal economic activities (mainly tourism, construction and fishing companies)^[51].

With regard to network structures it is noteworthy that unlike cannabis smuggling organisations in Europe—which tend to be informal, rapidly changing and decentralised (i.e., more cooperative than corporative)—the organisations that operate in Morocco are likely to be stable and geographically rooted, for the basic reason that they need to grow, harvest, collect, manufacture and store the product on a yearly basis, and these activities presuppose minimising volatility of structures and transactions (EMCDDA, 2008). While the organisations that run the trafficking to Europe often cooperate with European organisations, using their logistical infrastructure for storage purposes, the passages regarding hashish within Morocco seem to be almost completely under the control of domestic criminal enterprises^[52]. In this context, traffickers from West Africa or South America do not seem to be significantly involved.

Between 2004 and 2007 the Moroccan government launched a series of campaigns aimed to reduce the cannabis production and trafficking, presenting itself to the international community, and to the EU in particular, as a country actively committed in the fight against drug trafficking. Assessing the effectiveness of these campaigns is difficult, given the fact that, in spite of the studies on the extent of cannabis cultivation that were undertaken in collaboration with Morocco in primary producing areas in 2003, 2004 and 2005, no reliable and cross-checked data estimating the *amount* of cannabis produced and seized in the country is available: data should be interpreted in the light of historical precedents—i.e., anti-drug initiatives that were launched in the 1990s, which bore limited results. Key areas of traditional production (e.g., near Chefchaouen and Issaguen) do not seem to have been touched by eradication efforts, while in other areas (for example between Chefchaouen and Tangier, on the Atlantic coast) eradication seems to have been effective^[53].

Fig. 4 – Cannabis seizures

Source: Author's interview with I16 (3 May 2012)

On the side of the fight against trafficking activities, Fig. 4 documents an increase in seizures after 2004. At the same time a slight increase in the number of recorded drug-related crimes from 2006 (Fig. 5) does not seem to say much: the only phenomenon that seems to be confirmed over the past few years is a relatively gradual decline in the trafficking of Moroccan resin towards the European markets^[54].

Fig. 5 - Total drug-related crimes at the national level, number of police-recorded offences

Source: UNODC (2009)

If one looks beyond absolute figures and aggregated data, it becomes clear that lawenforcement action has been quite selective: it was mainly directed against some production areas, and it was targeting *some* specific actors along the supply chain rather than others (Van der Veen, 2004).

In overall terms, the way the Moroccan government has been committed to countering drug trafficking remains therefore ambiguous. The logic behind such ambivalence is clear, and it has little to do with public intentions and international declarations, but rather with domestic stability. On

the one hand, if the cannabis production and smuggling industry spiralled out of control, the rise in strength of cannabis barons could create economic and political powers that could tilt political equilibrium, and eventually challenge the authority of the state in some areas^[55]. The state cannot allow a breach in its monopoly of territorial control, and a watchful eye is to be kept on activities that have an important role for the economy and the stability of a region. Moreover, the very moment in which virtually all of European countries were documenting the prevalence of hashish of Moroccan origin in their domestic drug market, lax responses would trigger international stigma, while EU cooperation funds (i.e., MEDA program) were available as inducements for addressing the problem.

On the other hand, an indiscriminately repressive policy in absence of economic alternatives could backfire, not so much in terms of brutality image, but above all because of the uncertain consequences of blowing on the fire of deeply rooted socioeconomic problems in remote areas whose loyalty and political alignment has historically been mediated through close-knit clientelist relations.^[56] Corruption on the other hand, is the mechanism that allows the aligning of the formal with the extra-legal. The existing equilibrium results from the reproduction of dynamics of protection and extraction, a balance that is far from formal and official, and that is stuck via systematic corruption and a blind eye on extra-legal activities that meet the international demand for cannabis. In other words, pervasive corruption could be seen as a form of extraction from the economic value that the cannabis industry has for Morocco, and that cannot be formally taxed, while formal prohibition is a condition for keeping the prices high. In this context, it is all too evident that while systematic bribes at check points along the roads were relatively easy to observe, they would “tax” narcotics at a point of the supply line where the risk was relatively low and the money value still little. One can only logically hypothesise that the magnitude of deals, along with the water-tightness of collusive modus operandi, would proportionally grow as cannabis moves into fewer hands that control the riskiest and most remunerative passages towards the European markets.

Targeted and selective law enforcement actions are directed against actors who seem to escape political control, or more simply do not contribute to oiling the clientelist web of relations that upon which social and political consent are based.^[57] As such, their growth could potentially become a threat to existing power configurations. This way the de facto Moroccan state protects the organisations that are best connected to political power circles, using them also to keep territory under control⁷⁰. This situation is far from new: the previous state offensive on drug barons, during the 1990s, saw the army deployed in the Rif, and the dismantlement of northern smuggling connections, leaving the Casablanca traffickers untouched. Ten years later, one could still observe how in a couple of instances (e.g., in Nador and Tangier) networks that proved to act independently were eliminated^[58]. The law enforcement efforts of the Moroccan government may have contributed to the concentration of cannabis trafficking (import/export) in the hands of a limited number of drug barons that are well connected to state power, providing the Moroccan state with a stronger grip on the trade⁷². The functioning of this relations system is oiled by widespread and rooted corruption practices, which link drug traffickers and government officials, becoming a factor that contributes to a form of stability.

During the period of observation Moroccan newspapers periodically reported the opening of trials involving police officers (mainly in the North of the country). Yet, they typically failed to follow up on the cases, and in the end, no information is to be found about the way the trial ends^[59]. In a case that came to be known as the “Tetouan scandal” seven lawyers wrote a public letter on a weekly to denounce widespread corruption among judges in charge of drug trafficking trials: the seven lawyers were put under trial and eventually deprived of their professional credentials. Notwithstanding, the caveat that goes with all similar forms of perceptual measurements, the high level of corruption can be understood also by checking Transparency International’s *Corruption Perceptions Index*: the score stays in a range comprised between 3.2 and 3.7 without relevant changes during the observation period.

Beside domestic interdiction and systematic corruption, the dynamics of the Morocco illicit drug industry are influenced international interdiction/law enforcement operations. The efforts made on the international side have affected mainly the routes used by traffickers to transport cannabis to Europe. Predictably, growing cooperation between the Kingdoms of Morocco and Spain on counter-narcotics activities and the consolidation of interdiction action have stimulated the development of a series of alternative routes and smuggling methods, in particular after the reinforcement of the radar system by Spanish authorities^[60] for interception purposes.

In addition to the traditional Mediterranean route that is still considered the main avenue for shipping big loads, a new route has developed mainly by smaller traffickers along the Atlantic. Its departure points are located in the ports in the area delimited by Tangier and Rabat, and it permits to avoid interdiction around the Strait of Gibraltar, where patrolling by Spanish authorities is more intense^[61]. Routes are diversified due to the use by traffickers of a variety of transportation means, including planes, buses, trains, legitimate delivery services, boats, fishing boats, ocean-bound vessels and, in particular in recent years, light planes and helicopters.

Conclusions

The empirical analysis of both cases has shed light on how the image representing failed states as captured by a sort of an alien presence called (transnational) organised crime, while repeated and propagated in policy and scholarly circles to the point of becoming almost a *cliché*, is fraught with misleading inadequacies. The idea that transit countries are fragile containers passively hosting illicit flows of which they are victims does not withstand scrutiny. By contrast, the evidence gathered points to the need for shifting attention towards mechanisms of state protection and clientelist sponsorship, avoiding misleading simplifications such as the equation “smuggler = terrorist”^[62]. The analysis of the politico-criminal nexus in the region would indicate that it is more useful to make use of a patron-client relations analytical scheme – that is, one focussing on alliances based on unequal power relationships, on networks that blend together hierarchy and (some) reciprocity, and on forms of collusion with the worlds of legitimate government and

business.

In the two cases scrutinised, the presence of foreign criminal actors and the toooften evoked ghost of “narco-terrorists” hiding among them, neither seem to explain much nor to add much to existing explanations. So far commentaries that assume organic alliances among Latin-American and North African “narco-terrorist” have stood out for lack of substantiated evidence. If anything, the fact that economic opportunities linked to world drug economy have provided disproportionate incentives in countries and areas suffering from low economic standards, should rather induce reflection on how in these regions the significant drug mark-ups that exist between production, wholesale and retail prices, enormously inflated as they are by the globally lost “war on drugs”, entail impossible costs for state capacity.

As suggested by Snyder and Duran-Martinez (2009), the study of state authorities, be they military circles, or other selective law enforcers driven by collusive forms of interest co-optation and representation, are key to understanding dynamics of drug-related organised crime and its impact on stability, via direct or indirect forms of selective protection, repression, and extraction^[63]. The case of Guinea-Bissau, in particular, shows that destabilisation became manifest in parallel with the intensification of both competition and international attention on drug smuggling activities. Up to that moment, the consolidation of state-sponsored protection rackets meant that illicit markets could be substantially peaceful. The fact that violence was limited to small circles offers a plausible illustration of the fact that narcotics in the country are an *affaire* touching mainly apical structures. There is no “war on drug” to talk about, nor any “war-on-drug”-related large-scale violent escalation.

So far, the efforts made by international community to halt political instability by mentoring security forces and promoting economic developments have failed. Underfunded post-conflict assistance projects in Guinea-Bissau were managed from Dakar and failed to reach the countryside^[64], following the coups international missions and donors abandoned the country, while the cashew nut export sector collapsed (Nichols, 2012). An explicit strategy to tackle organised crime has been missing⁷⁹, while narrowly conceived technical approach to security sector reform proved to be unable to face the main (political) problem of military interference. All existing estimates of cocaine trafficking profits in West Africa show a clear disproportion vis-à-vis states’ security and military budgets in the region.

Behind all this, the main limitation in the way in which the international community has been failing Guinea-Bissau is probably to be traced back to a conceptual misunderstanding regarding the nature of the state weakness and failure. The international community comes to Western Africa trying to re-organise the state according to a Western ideal type, or better “like a mechanic that repairs a broken car”—as one interviewed officer affirmed^[65]. This perspective proved to be misleading: it is hard to fix something that was not there in the first place, such as “good governance”. Fixation on a given diagnosis of the problem (state capture) has contributed to obfuscating the search for different strategies. Efforts directed at grasping regional dimensions of

drug trade and governance, for example, may be more rewarding. As Davin O'Reagan (2014) suggests, flows are not just "shifting between countries": the entire drug industry should be understood as part of a regional network. It is in this analytical perspective one should understand recent emphasis on the growing role of Guinea Conakry as a major new node for fuelling drug trafficking networks (WACD, 2014) next to the presumed declining importance of Guinea-Bissau.

Although drug production and smuggling traditionally constitute a significant part of the estimated 40% of GDP that refers to the "informal economy" of Morocco (Hibou, 1995: 136), the interplay between drug-related actors and structures, as well as the configuration of drug-smuggling network and protection rackets, did not lead the country toward violent occurrences and political instability. Widespread corruption seals an equilibrium that is meant not to unsettle the *Makhzen*, while gaining political credit and financial credits with external pressure for mounting anti-drug initiatives. Needless to say, corruption does not enrich the state, but some of its functionaries and representatives who sit on top of a dense web of clientele: in a system that still has marked inclination towards patrimony; an equilibrium reached among clientele is (deceptively) reflected in the image of state stability. For uncomfortable that it may sound, and in spite of the counter-narcotics efforts for which Morocco should be credited, drug trafficking keeps the characteristics of a state-sponsored activity: one cannot explain the persistence of the problem by referring to Morocco as a fragile state at risk of capture. Those actors that are (allowed to be) involved in drug trafficking have a stake in the maintenance of the status quo. The analysis has found virtually no evidence of serious political challenges to licit powers related to the illicit drug economy: no cannabis-funded political ambitions that ultimately are not in line with those of governing elites and authorities were detected. Therefore, the focus should be shifted on consolidated mechanisms of state-protection, whose stability is to be understood also given their connection to cultivation and production.

Morocco and Guinea-Bissau remain quite difficult to compare. During the period under scrutiny the "kif question" in Morocco was in its essence concentrated in a remote region: as such, it would probably lend itself to a study through the same lenses that have been employed for researching historically existing spheres of connivance between the Italian state and the Sicilian *Cosa Nostra* or the Calabrian *'Ndrangheta*^[66]. The same could not be said for the question of drugs and organised crime in Guinea-Bissau: here the state structures and apparatuses appear to be far less homogeneous, while elites are more competitive. State factions directly compete with each other over the control of the drug trade, and the military has proved from the very first moment well positioned in this competition, as they have the logistical means for transport, the storage facilities as well as the arms to protect a merchandise that is worth its weight in gold. This protection can be seen as recuperating those regulatory powers that have been forfeited under prohibitionist policies: they tax, they protect and set conditions to the operations of actors in this trade, so as to assure and retain state power, rather than losing it. The resulting image is quite different from the one suggested by the concept of state failure.

Finally, some insightful patterns recur in both cases. In both countries the transition from

“patrimony” to the state as a public domain proves to be particularly challenging, as the legitimacy problems raised by regular taxation seem to indicate: the fact that a relatively important segment of economic activity is ultimately hinging upon an illicit commodity does not help this passage. On the contrary, to put it with no indulgence, this situation bears a resemblance to the phase, typical of modern state formation, in which the state is little more than the organisational response to the problem of managing resources that allow the triumphant leader to further consolidate the monopoly of force, and control ever greater resources (Volkov, 2000: 16).

In empirical terms, both Guinea-Bissau and Morocco know a gradual decline in trafficking, and diversification of routes and drugs (cocaine in one case, methamphetamine in the other). Both countries lie along the routes that supply the rich and patrolled European narcotics market: the present analysis seems to corroborate the hypothesis that as narcotics get closer to the increasingly militarised demarcation between the African coast and Europe, where value is created and risk is the highest, the drug industry is controlled by fewer and fewer hands. What better than statesponsorship can minimise risk and maximise profits?

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[1] Twenty-five interviews aimed at corroborating research hypotheses that underlie this article were conducted within the framework of the EU project JUST/2010/DPIP/AG/1410: “New methodological tools for policy and programme evaluation”, with the financial support of the Prevention and Information Programme of the European Commission. Interviews were conducted either in person or via phone between July 2010 and October 2013. On each case the selection of interviewees has been made so as to ensure a balance between officers (and ex officers) in international organizations, scholars, journalists and NGO practitioners. A second, partial round of interviews was conducted when the need for data cross-validation emerged. Given the

[2] UNODC World Drugs Campaign 2009, available at: [accessed on 8 February 2014].

[3] Foreword to *The United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime*, Palermo in 2000, cit. in Inkster and Comolli 2012a.

[4] According to Naim, the probability that criminals acquire nuclear weapons are small, but the consequences are too catastrophic for one to dismiss the threat. For a critique of the concept of Mafia-state see especially Andreas (2012).

[5] “While each [drug] flow discussed in this study represents an independent problem, all are enabled by weakness in the rule of law. This weakness makes the region vulnerable to smuggling of all sorts” (UNODC 2013).

[6] For instance, the *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World* (<http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2008/02/weak-states-index>) defines weak states as countries that lack the essential capacity/will to fulfill four sets of government responsibilities: “fostering an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable economic growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate,

transparent, and accountable political institutions; securing their populations from violent conflict and controlling their territory; and meeting the basic human needs of their population.”

[7] See CIFP– Indicators of State Failure, available at: [accessed September 2014].

[8] For example: *Failed States Index, Political Instability Task Force, World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, Polity IV, Bertelsmann Index*. As Fearon (2010: 2) underlines “(t)he World Bank designates a state as fragile if its aggregate score falls in the bottom 40% of the Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA), a set of governance indicators”.

[9] See: Failed States Index (Fund for Peace), available at: [accessed September 2014].

[10] Cargo ships, fishing boats and aircrafts are usually reported to be the main instruments used by smugglers for reaching African shores from South America.

[11] According to the UNODC (2013), 18 tons would be worth 1.25 billion dollars at wholesale in Europe.

[12] The UNODC study “The Transatlantic Cocaine Market” (2011) estimates that “a kilogram of cocaine cost

[13] ,000 euro in Guinea-Bissau, 8,000 euro in Guinea and 10,000 euro in Gambia, rising to 16,000 euro in Senegal, 15,000 euro in Mali, 16,000 euro in Mauritania and 27,000 euro in Morocco.”¹³

See also Savage and Shanker, 2012.

[14] There is no evidence of significant drug production in Guinea-Bissau. However the UNODC (2012 and 2013) reported a rise in the local production of methamphetamine.

[15] Source: World Drug Report 2006 and World Drug Report 2007. The UNODC World Drug Report 2011 reports that 48 tons of cocaine have been confiscated in West Africa between 2005 and 2008.

[16] See “West Africa Drug Smuggling,” Africa Economic Develop Institute. Accessed 1 September 2014:

[accessed March 2013]¹⁷ “Guinea-Bissau sacks policeman who fought drug trade”, *Reuters*, 11 June 2007.

[17] A very similar story was reported also by interviewee I6 (12 April 2012).

[18] “The head of the army, Tagme na Wai, was killed in March 2009 by an attack that his men blamed on the serving president, João Vieira. In apparent retaliation, they attacked the presidential palace and killed the president. Tagme na Wai had accused Vieira of involvement in drug

trafficking prior to the 2008 elections, but the attacks appear to be the product of a long-standing rivalry between the two men.” See UNODC 2011 for a full account of these events.

[19] On the 2012 *coup d'état* see, for example: “Concern over Guinea-Bissau coup,” AJE, 13 April 2012, available at: [accessed September 2014].

[20] The Council members condemned the restrictions on freedom of assembly, opinion and information as well as the armed attacks that took place on Guinea-Bissau’s Bissalanca Air Force Base on 21 October, when six people were killed in an apparent failed counter-coup attempt.

[21] A joint assessment mission comprising AU, UN, EU, ECOWAS and Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) visited Bissau in the same month.

[22] Interview with I3 (20 April 2012).

[23] Interview with I9 (13 April 2012).

[24] Interview with I1 (1 July 2010).

[25] Interview with I25 (26 October 2013).

[26] Data derived from interviewees’ perceptions regarding the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. See:

[accessed September 2014]²⁸ See: [accessed March 2013]²⁹ Interview with I7 (2 October 2012).

[27] For instance, the Failed States Index indicator concerning Human Rights violations remains constant across time.

[28] Among the casualties of the drug conflicts were then-President Vieira, General Tagme Na Wai, General Ansumane Mané, General Verissimo Correia Seabra, Commodore Lamine Sanhá, Deputy Hélder Proença, Governor Baciro Dabó and Colonel Samba Djaló (UNODC, 2013: 16).

[29] See, among others: EUROPOL 2010; UNODC 2010, 2012, 2011 and 2013.

[30] Contrary to a widespread view, corruption affects government officers only at the at medium/higher levels, while it would be not so widespread among all the so-called white collars. The image of a failed state hollowed out by bribes is misleading, according to a few interviewees, among whom I9 (23 April 2012)³⁴ Interview with I2 (12 April 2012).³⁵ Interview with I8 (20 May 2012).³⁶ Interview with I6 (12 April 2012)³⁷ Ibid.

[31] Interview with I11 (21 May 2012)

[32] Interview with I2 (12 April 2012).

[33] Interview with I4 (10 April 2012).

[34] Interview with I2 (12 April 2012).⁴² Interview with I4 (10 April 2012).

[35] The flaring up of violence, before and after the assassination of Viera, would be the outcome of the struggle among these networks (interview with I2, 12 April 2012).⁴⁴ Interview with I2 (12 April 2012).

[36] Interview with I6 (12 April 2012).

[37] Interview with I4 (10 April 2012).

[38] Interview with I4 (10 April 2012).⁴⁸ Interview with I10 (23 April 2012)⁴⁹ Interview with I3 (13 April 2012).⁵⁰ Ibid.

[39] Interview with I8 (20 May 2012), I10 (23 April 2012) and I2 (12 April).

[40] Ibid.

[41] Transl. “Kif does not kill: hunger does”.

[42] Interview with Driss Ben Ali, by K. Oudrhiri in *Actuel – Casablanca*, via *Le Courier International*, n. 1153, December 2012, p. 27.

[43] See CIRI Data Project (2010), *The Physical Integrity Rights Index*, available at:

[accessed March 2013].

[44] According to the Failed State Index, negative data related to “security apparatus” may refer to: emergence of elite or praetorian guards loyal to a leader, that operate with impunity and by-pass the chain of command of regular armed forces; emergence of state-sponsored or state-supported private militias that terrorize political opponents, suspected enemies, or civilians seen to be sympathetic to the opposition; emergence of an “army within an army,” secret intelligence units, or other irregular security forces that serve the interests of a political clique or leader, armed resistance to the governing authority, violent uprisings and insurgencies, proliferation of independent militias, vigilantes, or mercenary groups that challenge the state’s monopoly of the use of force.

[45] Interview with I19 (13 April 2012).

[46] Interviews with I14 (8 May 2012).

[47] Interview with I19 (13 April 2012).

[48] Drug-related dynamics related the Western Sahara territory fall beyond the scope of the present article.

[49] Interview with I13 (3 May 2012) and I15 (4 May 2012).

[50] Interview with I12 (2 May 2012), I13 (3 May 2012), I17 (3 May 2012), I20 (4 May 2012).

[51] Interview with I12 (2 May 2012).

[52] Interview with I13 (3 May 2012).

[53] It should be stressed that the sole analysis of the hectares devoted to the cultivation of cannabis is not per se helpful when assessing production, because the introduction of new varieties of cannabis plant, with higher productivity, as well as a more intensive use of the existing land, may have permitted to compensate for loss of land. Interviews with I14 (8 May 2012) and I15 (4 May 2012).

[54] Interview with I16 (3 May 2012).

[55] Interview with I17 (3 May 2012).

[56] Ibid.

[57] Interview with I15 (4 May 2012).⁷⁰ Ibid.

[58] Interview with I17 (3 May 2012).⁷² Ibid.

[59] Interview with I18 (2 May 2012).

[60] In 2009, Spain expanded the use of SIVE by installing a fixed radar site in Ibiza, the first among a series of SIVE sites planned for the Balearic Islands, which are increasingly used as new transport routes for hashish originating from Morocco and Algeria.

[61] Interview with I12 (2 May 2012).

[62] Vanda Felbab-Brown and James Forest (2012) note that there exists no case of terrorist

organization whose origin coincides with a drug trafficking organization. According to I2, interviewed on 12 April 2012, evidence documenting the involvement of AQIM in cocaine smuggling along the “West Africa Route” has not been forthcoming.

[63] Snyder and Duran Martinez (2009, 253-254) define state-sponsored rackets “informal institutions through which public officials refrain from enforcing the law or, alternatively, enforce it selectively against the rivals of a criminal organization, in exchange for a share of the profits generated by the organization”.

[64] Interview with I9 and I10 (13 and 23 April 2012).⁷⁹ Interview with I1 (1 July 2010).

[65] Interview with I2 (12 April 2012).

[66] It remains to be demonstrated that drug-related clientelist systems in the Rif region have had role similar to the Italian mafias in replacing the state in brokerage, extortion and protection, in distorting subsidies, controlling other rackets, acting as a violent hand, and, finally, in directly negotiating with the state.